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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further action and initiatives: participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by National Alliance of Women's Organisations, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO) has more than a hundred members made up of women's organizations or women's sections of mixed groups headquartered in England, and individual subscribers. It seeks to promote empowerment, human rights, equality and justice for all women. It has a special role in relation to the European Women's Lobby (EWL), sending an elected delegate to the Lobby to represent women's concerns and needs from the region. With sister organizations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, NAWO forms the United Kingdom Joint Committee on Women, developing policy, representing women's concerns and views and implementing EWL strategies in the United Kingdom. In addition to its work with members of the alliance, NAWO also works in partnership with the Women's National Commission (United Kingdom) and many other organizations both nationally and internationally. NAWO is concerned, at this

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forty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, to bring together the two separate, major themes, which are fundamentally linked.

1. The media is a product which has social, moral and cultural implications. The use of the media is widespread, as entertainment, as an educational tool and as a public service. Because of the effect it has upon both the individual and society, consideration of its content and output is vital. Although civil society recognizes the importance of print, broadcasting and electronic means of communications, the concerns of women are frequently ignored and women's access to them and the benefits and dangers posed are inadequately recognized.

2. A mass media that is not gender sensitive marginalizes the contributions of women. Women's opportunities to be heard and therefore influence world events are still few, while this global industry continues with a predominance of men in the most influential and highly paid positions and a predominately masculine agenda change is likely to be slow.

3. Although progress has been made in both print and broadcast media, still more positive imaging of women is needed to counter the negative images which are degrading or detrimental to women and which encourage violence to women:

- Exploitation of women
- Sexual images
- Portrayal as victims
- Portrayal of overt violence against women
- Girls highly sexualized even well before puberty.

Continual repetition of these aspects, and in particular "on-screen violence", leads to "normalization" and acceptance of negative attitudes and stereotypes.

In addition, a relative absence of the portrayal of women in roles of authority and power exercised across a whole range of activities and not only as the childbearers and major nurturers also prevents both men and women from accepting the normality of women as equals with men.

4. New information technologies, such as the World Wide Web, have made a positive impact and provided an opportunity to empower all members of society. Freedom of information should be regarded as a right and no State should deny its citizens freedom to access information through this medium.

5. Where they do have access to the Web, the ability of women cannot be ignored. They have:

- Created and sustained information networks
- Created web-based commercial opportunities
- Communicated news
- Expanded their information and knowledge base
- Contributed to the economy
- Found ways to help one another and to be helped when exposed to violence
- Enabled work without travel and at lower expense

6. For these new technologies to be effective for women in their advancement, access must be ensured and enabling strategies developed. Frequently, women's access is marginalized by:

- Poverty and poverty of information
- Lack of education
- Computer illiteracy
- Lack of resources, including lack of a telephone line
- General inaccessibility
- Gender inequality.

7. The use of new information technologies has brought new problems with respect to the exploitation and trafficking of women, and pornography. It is deplorable that many of the successful and profitable web sites on the World Wide Web are of a pornographic nature. This is profoundly dangerous and detrimental to women and children, especially to the girl child, and has far-reaching consequences for society. Sustained action must be taken to put in place legislation affecting and regulating pornography.

8. In many areas of the world women experience poverty of information recognized as a major barrier to empowerment and development opportunities — this in a world which, in developed areas, is overwhelmed by excessive information and a constant flow of entertainment. For the empowerment of women everywhere to be realized, examples of good practice need to be shared so that all women can participate fully in the technology which has so much to offer for the advancement of women.

9. NAWO notes that the dangers and problems apparent in the new and emerging information technologies are, as is violence against women, a result of the historically unequal power relations between women and men (Beijing Platform for Action).[1] NAWO urges the full and public recognition of this fact and deplores the tendency to ascribe blame to families or to women themselves for the problems of violence, whether in the media or in the everyday world.

10. NAWO welcomes the fact that the United Nations provided great leadership in the passage of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to alter this historical pattern. It urges Governments and the United Nations to implement that resolution so that the media will reflect women leading in the prevention of war and the resolution of conflict.

11. NAWO further calls upon Governments to put in place effective legal and judicial systems, programmes and imaginative strategies, collect the necessary disaggregated statistics and monitor the results, and to ensure that findings and discussion in the Commission on the Status of Women are taken to all other relevant United Nations arenas and implemented in line with agreed goals to mainstream gender across the United Nations system.

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.